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SUBJECT: PROFILE OF AVIGAIL OUTPOST FOUNDER ELISHA MEIDAN

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Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On September 22, PolOff visited the settlement outpost of Avigail in the Hebron Hills and met with its founder, 30-year-old Elisha Meidan. Meidan, a new husband and father living in a converted bus, explained to PolOff that while he considers himself and his fellow outpost settlers to be "fighting the Arabs' encroachment on Israel," Avigail outpost is nonetheless a symbol of peaceful Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On September 22, PolOff visited the settlement outpost of Avigail, which is considered illegal by the GoI. Avigail, which is located in the Hebron Hills, was founded in December 2001 by Elisha Meidan, then aged twenty-one; it now has a population of 50 residents. Avigail sits on a hilltop overlooking the At-Tuwani Bedouin village and has a clear view of neighboring settlements and outposts dotting adjacent hilltops.

¶3. (C) Meidan, a water quality inspector for the Israel Water Authority, moved to the hilltop at the age of twenty-one with a friend and lived in a bus for several years. Prior to the conflict of 2006 with Hizbollah, Meidan wood-paneled the inside of his bus and converted it into a home. He also attached a living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom to the bus. Two years ago, he married a Jerusalemite who, he commented, took some convincing to move to the outpost. "If she didn't want to live here, I would have had a dilemma, because I built this house," Meidan said. Luckily, he said, his wife Miri -- who works as a teacher in the Gush Etzion settlement bloc -- is happy at home in their converted bus, though she misses city life. They share their home with their 18-month-old daughter.

¶4. (C) Meidan noted that because the house sits on the edge of the outpost and commands a view of the surrounding areas, if there is any trouble brewing among the Palestinians below, he can see it coming. Meidan added that in his view, he is fighting on behalf of Israel against the Arabs, by halting the Arabs' encroachment on Israeli lands. Avigail, the adjacent outpost of Maon, and the settlements of Susiya, Karmel, and Pene Hever form a strategic line which cuts the "Bedouins and Arabs from Egypt from connecting with the Palestinians," Meidan said. "It is hard to live here without being ideological," he added. "But ideology is not the only reason people live here."

¶5. (C) Within the last 8 years, Avigail -- located an hour's drive from Jerusalem -- has grown from a population of 2 to 50 (30 adults and 20 children; 16 families and 5 singles). Most residents live in caravans or trailers. PolOff observed two permanent houses and one synagogue, which is also used as

an administration office; in the middle of the outpost is a nursery caravan and a playground. Avigail residents range in ages from 25 to 40 and all children are under the age of five. The residents work as musicians, farmers, teachers, technicians, and handymen. The Avigail outpost is self-sustaining, with its own water pump and generator for electricity. Meidan noted that the outpost receives municipal garbage services because, he said, its residents pay city property taxes -- despite their properties being considered "illegal."

¶6. (C) Meidan said he believed that the GOI "pushed" him and fellow settlers to cultivate the area, because of its strategic location. He noted that he didn't receive subsidies or direct aid from the GOI. But, he said, there are times when the administration "puts a cover over its eyes," and the settlers need to build and inhabit their homes quickly. Meidan said the settlers and the Palestinian villagers are in direct competition to claim land area when the administration is lax on building regulations. Both groups try to construct homes as quickly as possible, and once a home is constructed and occupied, it is hard to evacuate or demolish. Meidan estimated that it takes about two weeks to bring in a caravan and hook it up to the generator grid and pipeline system for occupancy.

¶7. (C) Meidan said that since the start of the Obama administration, he has been "living under a question mark, not knowing if (he) plants a tree today (he) will have to uproot it tomorrow." He also asserted that the GOI has become stricter, because of American pressure. "Inspectors come all the time now," he said, "to check if there is new

JERUSALEM 00001754 002 OF 002

construction." Meidan took PolOff to an area in Avigail where two caravans recently erected were removed by the GoI. PolOff noted the cinderblock bases on which caravans once sat. The inspectors, Meidan said, do not warn outpost residents beforehand when they come to take away their homes.

¶8. (C) In Meidan's view, no Israeli politicians represent the voices of the outpost. He noted that he is not part of any political group, council or organization -- only a member of the small community of Avigail, which is governed by a townhall in which every decision is voted on by all residents.

¶9. (C) In Meidan's view, Avigail represents a model of Israeli-Palestinian relations. "There is peaceful coexistence here," Meidan said. "If Obama can come here and see, he will understand that peace is here. We are not obstacles to peace." (Note: The following day, September 23, Dina Jaabari of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Hebron confirmed for PolOff that the area surrounding Avigail in the Hebron Hills is host to some of the most violent clashes between Palestinians and settlers in the West Bank. End Note.)
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